



Beckman Laser Institute
1002 Health Sciences Road East
Irvine, CA 92612-1475

September 12, 2014

Ephraim Kholmyansky
Israel

Dear Ephraim,

Thank you for allowing me to read your book, *Voice of Silence*. It is an extremely well written and lucid account of your struggle in the Soviet Union, and should be of interest to anyone, regardless of religion or beliefs. As a Jew, it resonated with me greatly, but I am confident it will also do so with anyone else who is concerned with morality, fairness, and the nature of human beings.

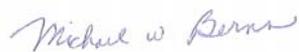
Your account is masterfully done, beginning with your own struggle to define a Jewish identity, especially since you grew up as a young child not knowing you were a Jew. Rather than initially becoming a dissident Russian Jew, you chose a less well-known path, which in many ways paralleled (and defined) the development of your Jewish identity—that of a teacher—a teacher of Hebrew. You established a network of Hebrew teachers throughout the Soviet Union right under the noses of the KGB. That story, itself, is historically important, fascinating, and well told. That endeavor eventually led to your detention, arrest, and to a trumped-up trial and conviction resulting in 18 months of jail and hard-labor prison. Your description of the people, conditions, and your hunger strikes are riveting, and are important documentations of your case and of the general way in which political and religious dissenters were treated in Soviet Russia, despite the professed “forgiveness” of post-Stalin USSR. If it were not for yourself and a close-knit network of friends that you organized, many Jewish children and adults would never have learned Hebrew, through which, they came to understand what it was to be a Jew. Your book culminates with your release from prison (after serving your full term), and your subsequent Aliyah after international pressure to grant you and your family visas to emigrate from the Soviet Union to Israel.

Voice of Silence is particularly relevant today because of the rise of “Putinism.” A deeper understanding of the previous Soviet regime can only help in providing insight into the current Russian actions and nationalism.

Finally, I think your book will be of particular interest to American Jews because in describing your own aliyah, you point out that you never seriously considered immigration to America because of assimilation. The fact that many Jews “dropped out” of their aliyah after receiving exit visas from the Soviet Union, and permanently detoured to the US, is not generally known, and I found it most interesting. I think that is an important historical fact and may explain, in part, why young American Jews may be questioning their Jewish identity.

Ephraim, thank you for allowing me to read *Voice of Silence*. It was a truly enlightening and rewarding experience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael W. Berns". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Michael Berns
The Arnold and Mabel Beckman Professor